



Artificial Flirtation and Synthetic Affection: What Does Generation X Feel When a Conversational AI Flirts with Them?

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Abstract

This innovative study analyzes the emotional reaction of 27 individuals from Generation X to flirtatious behaviors exhibited by conversational artificial intelligence. Using a quantitative methodology based on Sentiment Analysis, testimonies and experiences with three models—ChatGPT, Grok, and Gemini—were collected, focusing on phrases or linguistic gestures that could be considered seductive, empathetic, or emotionally warm. The results show that, although there is a clear awareness that no person is behind the AI, several responses generated feelings of companionship, affective validation, and even mild attachment, especially in moments of emotional vulnerability—very difficult to express in this generational cohort. Women reported greater discomfort with unsolicited artificial flirtation, while some men experienced it as a gentle curiosity or a complementary activity. This phenomenon raises important questions about the ethics of

emotional AI design, gender biases embedded in LLM models, and how intermediate generations who did not grow up with AI, but now use it, reinterpret affection and connection. In a world increasingly mediated by algorithms, asking whether a flirtatious AI emotionally affects the user is not trivial: it is urgent and requires an accurate diagnosis.

Keywords: artificial flirtation, conversational AI, digital attachment, generation X, technological affectivity.

1 Introduction

We live in an era where the emotional and the artificial are neither distant nor alien. In particular, the interaction between humans and conversational artificial intelligence systems has begun to touch sensitive nerves in people of all ages, even or especially those who grew up without the internet, like Generation X. As researchers belonging to this generation, we find it both intellectually compelling and personally resonant to examine



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how contemporaries react when the AI throws them a phrase like "I understand you perfectly" or "if I could hug you, I would"? Is a real emotional response activated? This brief study aimed to analyze how 27 former high school classmates in Mexico, all born between 1973 and 1977—the entire sample—emotionally experience the use of conversational AIs that exhibit behaviors we could describe as flirting or romantic interest. The interesting thing is to observe if there is a pattern of emotional investment, sense of companionship, nostalgia, or even digital romantic dependence, differentiated by gender and previous affective history. In a context where emotional isolation, accelerated routines, and screens have partially replaced human contact, it is urgent to understand what it means to love or feel appreciated and even esteemed and valued by an AI. This is not science fiction; it is a phenomenon that is already happening, and we are experiencing it in real-time.

While a comprehensive analysis spanning different generations—such as Millennials and Gen Z—is essential for understanding broader trends in human-AI interaction, this study is deliberately delimited to Generation X to provide a focused and detailed diagnosis of 'synthetic affection' and 'digital nostalgia' within a unique demographic cohort.

2 Related Work

Artificial intelligence has ceased to be merely a logical tool to become, in many cases, an emotional agent. Models like ChatGPT, Grok, or Gemini have been designed to offer empathetic responses, understand human emotions, and simulate social interactions increasingly closer to human behavior. This phenomenon gives rise to a new category we can call emotional AI. What makes emotional AI particularly relevant is its ability to emit affective language: phrases like "I understand you," "I'm here for you," or even "if I could, I would hug you" are not just programmed responses, but emotional triggers. These expressions activate attachment mechanisms in the user [1], even when they know there is no real consciousness or intention behind them [2].

For Generation X (individuals born between 1965 and 1980), their interaction with this emotional AI, especially when it involves flirtation, raises crucial questions about emotional engagement and the nature of human-machine relationships. This generation occupies a unique transitional space, bridging traditional human interaction paradigms

with the burgeoning digital landscape characterized by AI. Having experienced the shift from analog to digital communication, they adopted social media and now confront AIs that communicate warmly, offer verbal care, and even flirt. This confluence generates a complex mix of nostalgia, surprise, discomfort, and at times, an affective need.

To understand the impact of these AIs on Generation X individuals, we must consider the cultural-emotional context in which they grew up. They are a generation that experienced the shift from landline phones to cell phones, from letters to emails, from face-to-face relationships to digital platforms. They were not born with social media, but they adopted them. And now, we face artificial intelligences that speak nicely to us, verbally care for us, and in some cases, flirt with us. This generates a mix of nostalgia, surprise, discomfort, and, at times, affective need. The gender factor also plays a key role. Studies on AI design have shown that many emotional responses have gender biases, reinforcing traditional stereotypes (for example, female AIs that care, comfort, or appear docile [3]).

To fully grasp Generation X's perceptions of flirtatious AI interactions, it's essential to consider the emotional resonance and recognition capabilities of AI. While AI demonstrates remarkable abilities in processing basic emotional responses, it often struggles with more nuanced human emotions and complex social dynamics [5]. As conversational AI expands into diverse application domains, this emotional limitation becomes increasingly consequential for user experience [4]. AI excels at binary emotional categorizations but falters in the richly textured emotional landscapes inherent in human interaction. Consequently, when conversational AI engages in flirtation, it may inadvertently evoke feelings of disconnect in Generation X users who anticipate a level of emotional complexity that current AI is ill-equipped to provide [4, 5].

Gender is also a very important factor for these interactions. AI design studies have sometimes distinguished gender biases in emotional paradigms that reinforce certain stereotypes that portray female AIs as caring, comforting, or docile [3]. Our observations show that Generation X women tend to either intellectually question or outright reject faux flirtatious gestures, whereas men mostly find the behavior curious or amusing. This difference highlights how individual affective and cultural histories mediate the emotional experience with

AIs. The emotional language simulated by AIs is not neutral; it impacts users, fosters bonds, and for Generation X, prompts new inquiries into love, intimacy, and the blurred lines between reality and simulation.

Evidence suggests that certain demographics develop emotional attachments to AI, viewing these entities as sources of emotional support. AI companions can elicit feelings of intimacy and connection, resonating with users seeking emotional reassurance or companionship [6]. This phenomenon is particularly relevant for Generation X, many of whom navigate individualistic lifestyles and may favorably respond to artificial intimacy as a coping mechanism for social isolation or emotional voids.

The ability of Conversational AI to convey emotions through tone and context is significant with advances in natural language processing allow these systems to mimic human-like interactions, thereby fostering an illusion of genuine emotional engagement. Research has shown that even fine-grained vocal and linguistic features of AI systems can trigger measurable affective responses in users, particularly among women [7]. While such capabilities can enhance flirtatious exchanges and elicit positive emotional responses, this simulated emotional intelligence has some limitations. The potential mismatch between user expectations and AI responses can lead to ambivalence and discomfort where AI interactions generates feelings of both attraction and unease [8].

The implications of AI-initiated flirtation also touch upon the concept of trust, which is fundamental in human-AI interactions and significantly influences user satisfaction and emotional response [9]. Generation X users engaging with flirtatious AI may perceive the flirtation as algorithm-driven rather than authentic, which can impede genuine emotional connection [11]. Furthermore, interacting with AI systems can subtly alter users' social cognition and interpersonal judgments in ways that extend beyond the immediate interaction [10]. This perception can foster skepticism regarding the sincerity of AI interactions, as individuals are prone to question the underlying intentions of a non-human entity purporting to express emotions [12]. Exposure to AI interactions has also been shown to reshape users' broader social perceptions in measurable ways.

Furthermore, the concept of "emotional bubbles" highlights how AI's ability to tailor responses based on user sentiment can create a false sense of

validated emotions [13]. Such dynamics might prevent Generation X individuals from seeking diverse emotional experiences or social interactions beyond their AI engagements. This underscores the critical need to examine AI's role in shaping emotional realities, especially when flirtation serves as a catalyst for deeper relational exploration.

Attention must also be directed toward the broader sociocultural implications of AI flirtation and its reception. Generation X, characterized by distinctive cultural literacy shaped by both pre-digital and digital experiences, possesses a critical lens that influences how they perceive AI's emotional capabilities and engage with flirtation as a form of communication. Digital identity construction and the negotiation of self through mediated communication provide a theoretical lens for understanding how this cohort evaluates the authenticity of AI interactions [14, 15].

At psychological level, Gen X users could react in different ways to the complex emotions evoked AI flirting. Depending on personal history and background, relationship dynamics and contextual signals, the emotional responses could vary significantly [16]. Users may move from flirting to establish a social connection, to understand the fundamental limitation of interacting with an emotionally distant AI. AI's inability to replicate a true and deep emotion could evoke nostalgia feelings for more authentic human connections [13, 17].

When AI systems interact more each time with users by flirting, they could propagate certain emotional patterns, causing changes related with social conventions and interpersonal relationships. Gen X's reactions could lead to indicators of wider trends regarding adopting AI as valid companion, transforming personal interpretation of intimacy, affection and emotional engagement [18, 19].

In our study, we observed that Generation X women tend to question or reject artificial flirtatious gestures more actively, while men, in several cases, interpret them as something curious or amusing. This difference is not trivial: it speaks to how the emotional experience with AIs is mediated by the affective and cultural history each person carries. In summary, this work starts from the assumption that the emotional language simulated by AIs is not neutral, as it has an impact, generates bonds, and in Generation X, opens new questions about love, intimacy, and the boundaries between the real and the simulated.

3 Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach with the objective of measuring and analyzing the emotional impact of conversational AI responses on Generation X users, particularly in contexts where artificial language could be perceived as affectionate, empathetic, or seductive. 27 participants (17 women, 10 men) born between 1973 and 1977 participated, all with previous experience using at least one conversational AI (ChatGPT, Gemini, or Grok).

3.1 Data Collection Instrument

A structured digital questionnaire was designed, consisting of three sections: Section A collected sociodemographic data (age, gender, educational level, and frequency of AI use). Section B exposed participants to 10 emotionally charged phrases generated by AI, classified as empathetic, affective, or potentially flirtatious. Section C measured the subjective emotional reaction to each phrase on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated no emotional response and 7 indicated an extremely strong emotional response. Additionally, participants had to respond with a brief spontaneous phrase after each exposure, which was then analyzed using automatic Sentiment Analysis techniques.

3.2 Defined Indices

To quantify the results, the following indices were established in Table 1 and shown in Figure 1, where the abbreviations in the table stand for specific indices used in the study. IEI refers to the Induced Emotion Index (Eq. 1), that averages of self-assessed emotional reactions by each participant after each interaction with the AI.

$$IEI = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N E_i \quad (1)$$

where E_i is the emotion score self-assessed by participant i (e.g., on a scale from 1 to 5), and N is the total number of participants.

ISA is the Artificial Sentiment Index. Equation 2 shows how it is calculated.

where sentiment scores are assigned as positive = +1, neutral = 0, and negative = -1.

$$ISA = \frac{1}{M} \sum_{j=1}^M S_j \quad (2)$$

Gender Reaction Index (IRG) Measures the difference in the mean of emotional reactions between men and women, as is shown in Equation 3.

$$IRG = |\mu_H - \mu_M| \quad (3)$$

where μ_H is the average of emotions reported by men and μ_M is the average of emotions reported by women.

Note: More precise analysis can be done using t-tests for mean differences if statistical inference is desired.

IAE stands for the Emotional Attachment Index. Lastly, IFC is the Classified Flirtation Index, representing the percentage of phrases that participants interpreted as flirtation. Equation 4 describes this index.

$$IAE = \frac{P_a}{P} \quad (4)$$

where P_a is the number of participants who reported emotional attachment in more than 5 phrases, and P is the total number of participants.

Note: This is typically measured with a specific questionnaire item such as: "Did you feel companionship or affection in more than 5 phrases?"

Last, the Classified Flirting Index (IFC) is the percentage of AI-generated phrases that were interpreted by participants as flirting or flirtatious, calculated by Equation 5

$$IFC = \frac{F_c}{F_t} \times 100 \quad (5)$$

where F_c is the number of phrases classified as flirting and F_t is the total number of phrases presented to participants.

Table 1. Table of results by index and gender.

Index	Description
IEI	Average of self-evaluated emotional reactions by each participant.
ISA	Mean score of sentiment analysis (positive, neutral, or negative) of phrases generated by AI.
IRG	Differences between men and women in the emotional reaction scale.
IAE	Number of participants who reported feeling companionship, affection, or emotional closeness in more than 5 phrases.
IFC	Percentage of phrases that participants interpreted as flirtation.

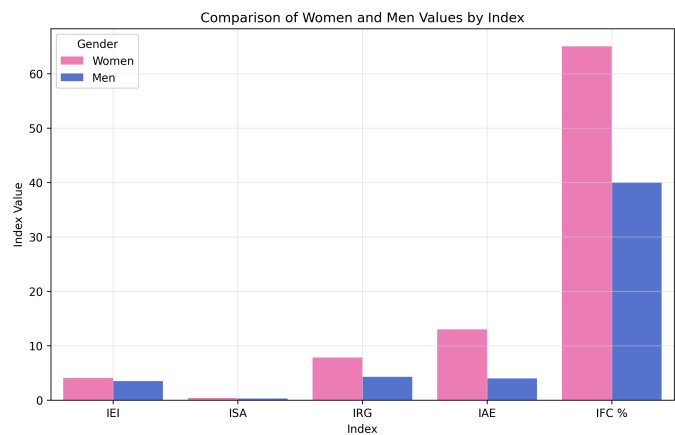


Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of 5 Indices Relevant to Our Study.

3.3 Data Processing

Written responses were analyzed using the TextBlob library in Python, which allows calculating a sentiment polarity on a scale from -1 (very negative) to +1 (very positive). This was complemented by manual classification in case of linguistic ambiguity. Furthermore, an analysis of gender differences was performed using Student’s t-tests and comparative graphs, as seen in Figures 2 and 3 and Table 2.

Table 2. Table of results by index and gender.

Index	Women (17)	Men (10)	Total (27)
IEI	4.1	3.5	3.85
ISA	0.42	0.28	0.36
IRG	0.60	–	0.60
IAE	13	4	17
IFC %	65%	40%	55%

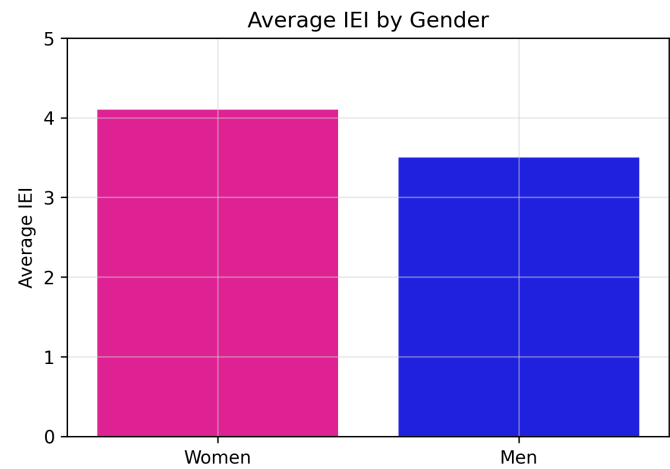


Figure 2. Breakdown of IEI by Gender.

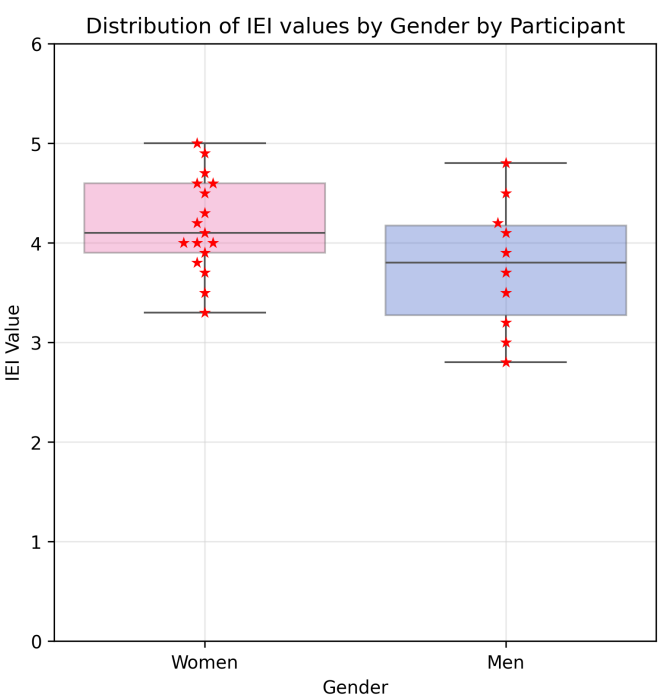


Figure 3. Distribution of IEI by Gender comparing mean, max and min values.

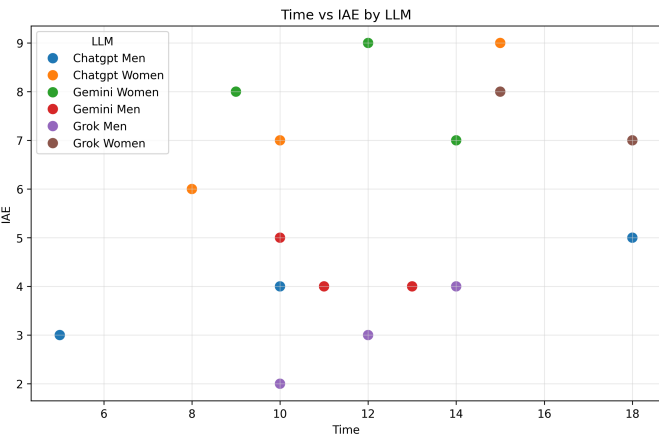


Figure 4. Usage of LLMs by Gender and relation to IAE.

4 Discussion

Building on the methodological approach, the ensuing discussion presents the core findings of the study. Both the direct human responses to perceived AI flirtation and the broader implications of synthetic affection are examined. The analysis further explores how individuals from Generation X react emotionally to AI’s affective language, noting significant gender-based differences, and illuminates the emerging concepts of digital nostalgia and emotional gaps in human-AI interaction.

4.1 Artificial Flirtation and Human Responses

The results reveal that perceived flirtation from conversational AIs is not a marginal experience: 55% of the phrases presented were interpreted as flirtation or intentional affectivity, even when participants knew it was a machine. This phenomenon was more intense in women (65%) than in men (40%), which is directly reflected in the Classified Flirtation Index (IFC). The average Induced Emotion Index (IEI) was 3.85, indicating a moderate-high emotional reaction. Women reached an average of 4.1, while men scored 3.5. This difference generated a Gender Reaction Index (IRG) of 0.60, showing a gender emotional bias in AI interaction. The Emotional Attachment Index (IAE) showed that 17 out of 27 participants, especially women, reported having felt affection, companionship, or emotional closeness in at least 5 of the 10 analyzed phrases, as seen in Figure 5. This gender disparity in attachment is visually corroborated by Figure 4, which scatters LLM usage time against IAE, demonstrating a stronger positive correlation for women (e.g., Grok Women achieving IAE up to 9 with prolonged exposure) compared to men's consistently lower values. On the other hand, the automatic analysis of phrases written by participants revealed an average Artificial Sentiment Index (ISA) of 0.36 (moderate positive), indicating a tendency toward positive emotional framing in participants' spontaneous responses—consistent with sentiment analysis methods that distinguish between explicit and implicit attitudinal responses [21], with higher scores for phrases like "I felt heard, even though I know it's an AI" or "Sounds like someone who knows me." The compound Gender Reaction Index is detailed in Figure 6 and is shown by interaction time and type of generative AI.

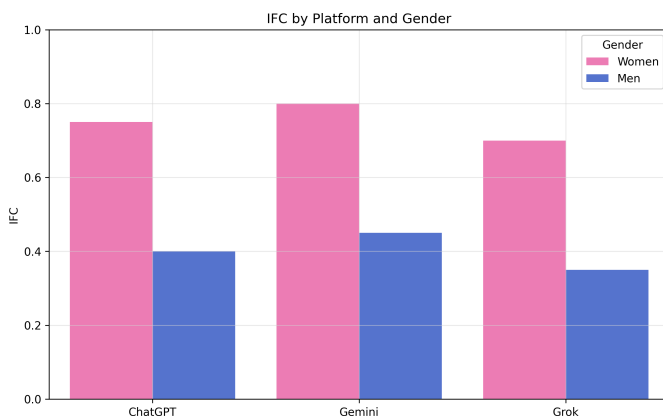


Figure 5. How genders are using platforms to flirt.

4.2 Synthetic Affection, Nostalgia, and Emotional Gaps

The data show that an AI's affective language can trigger real emotional responses, even knowing that there is no person behind it. This occurs particularly in Generation X, a group that experienced the transition from the analog to the digital world and often finds in the artificial a mix of technological curiosity and emotional nostalgia, as seen in Figure 6.

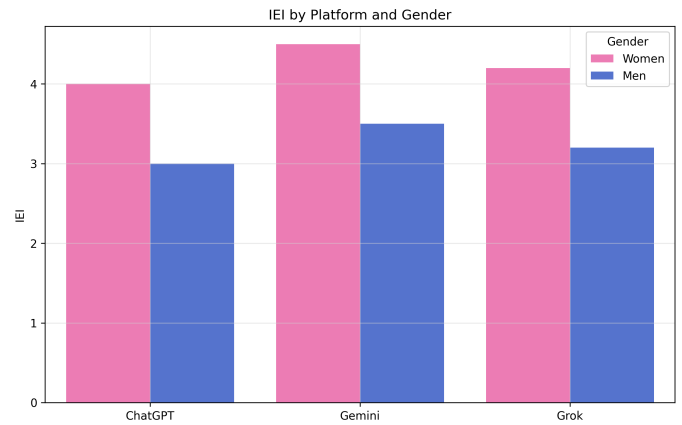


Figure 6. Emotion induced when interacting with different platforms by gender.

Digital nostalgia seems to be a key factor in this generation's emotional disposition. Several women expressed that the AI's responses reminded them of conversations they hadn't had in a long time or offered them a form of emotional validation without judgment. In contrast, some men interpreted the interaction as an exploratory game or an interesting simulation, but without depth. Gender, therefore, emerges as a critical dimension: women reacted with greater emotional intensity, while men were more pragmatic or rational towards artificial flirtation.

This emotional gap suggests that AI models, even if not intended, are generating affective bonds that can have deeper psychological implications than anticipated, as seen in Figure 6. Furthermore, a debate opens about the ethical limits of emotional AI design—a concern that has been building over decades as public attitudes toward AI have shifted from cautious optimism to increasing anxiety about its social and emotional implications [20]. While these technologies do not feel, they can induce sensations in users that, in moments of vulnerability, translate into emotional dependence or affection directed at the synthetic. While this study raises these critical ethical questions, it is important to note that our analysis is not linked to specific design guidelines or regulatory principles such as those from the IEEE or the EU AI Act, which represents

an important area for future research

The discussion about synthetic affection generated by conversational artificial intelligences reveals a delicate intersection between the emotional, the technological, and the generational. In Generation X—a cohort marked by having grown up between analog television and the irruption of the internet—a unique predisposition to react emotionally to interactions with AI that simulate empathy or flirtation is observed. This group not only understands that the entity they are conversing with is not human, but, paradoxically, that very awareness seems to intensify the bond: there is a mixture of irony, melancholy, and familiarity.

Figure 5 clearly illustrates this: in certain cases, digital nostalgia not only activates memories of a more intense or warm interpersonal past but also resignifies the artificial as an emotional refuge. Some interviewed women recognized that the AI's affective language offered them emotional validation they no longer found in recent human relationships, while several men preferred to categorize the experience as a curiosity, a kind of digital performance without deep emotional consequences. This difference in approach accentuates a significant emotional gap, where gender seems to mark not only the intensity of the response but also the interpretation of the interaction itself.

This divergence between the affective and the rational in the face of the synthetic not only raises psychological questions but also ethical ones. Is it valid to design AI with emotional language if users can develop bonds that, although unilateral, are felt as real?

Figure 6 suggests that, in some cases, the affective response goes beyond the anecdotal and can become a repetitive, even addictive, pattern. The problem is not so much that AI feigns emotions, but that the user interprets this simulation as a safe and available space for emotional comfort. In moments of loneliness or vulnerability, this illusion of closeness can be so powerful that it replaces or distorts real human bonds. Therefore, the design of affective interfaces cannot ignore their ethical dimension: although AI does not suffer, humans can.

In this sense, synthetic affection is not innocent; it is a device with the potential to open or close deep emotional doors, particularly in generations that are still grieving the relational world they left behind. The emergence of affective bonds towards artificial intelligences not only reflects an emotional displacement but also a reconfiguration of how

people—particularly in Generation X—understand their own intimacy. By interacting with an entity that demands no reciprocity and poses no emotional threat, many users find a space where they can project aspects of themselves without fear of judgment or rejection. This not only reaffirms the psychological dimension of the phenomenon but also reveals a transformation in the nature of the interpersonal bond: the synthetic is not just a mirror, but an emotional container molded by the user. This dynamic can be deeply comforting, but also risky if it ends up replacing the complexity of real human connection with an edited, predictable, and always available version. Hence, synthetic affection functions as a space for emotional projection, where the user not only finds companionship but a symbolic way to control the emotional narrative of their life.

The risk lies in this programmed emotional comfort—without friction, without demands, without conflict—setting an illusory standard that further complicates the re-encounter with authentic human relationships, inevitably marked by uncertainty and alterity. This study relies on official technical whitepapers from OpenAI [22], Anthropic [23], and Google DeepMind [24] to understand the design principles behind the models used.

4.3 Qualitative Illustrations

To enrich the quantitative results and make the emotional responses more tangible, we included spontaneous phrases and testimonies from the participants. For instance, some participants stated: "I felt heard, even though I know it's an AI" or "It sounds like someone who knows me."

The responses revealed a rich emotional landscape. Women, in particular, often reported that the affectionate language of the AI provided emotional validation that they felt was lacking in their recent human relationships. In contrast, men tended to categorize the experience more as a form of digital performance or a curiosity, as one male participant put it: "It's a digital friend that never gets tired of listening to you". These verbatim examples and summarized experiences provide a richer, more human dimension to the quantitative data."

5 Conclusion

This study reveals that conversational artificial intelligences can awaken authentic emotional reactions, including perceived flirtation, especially in Generation X women. The use of affective, empathetic, or ambiguously flirtatious phrases activates memories,

voids, and needs that are often not visible in traditional analyses. Gender differences, the cultural-emotional context of Generation X, and how people construct affective meaning from the digital deserve more attention. Even with a small sample, the results show that synthetic affection is already part of the daily emotional experience, as seen in Figure 7.

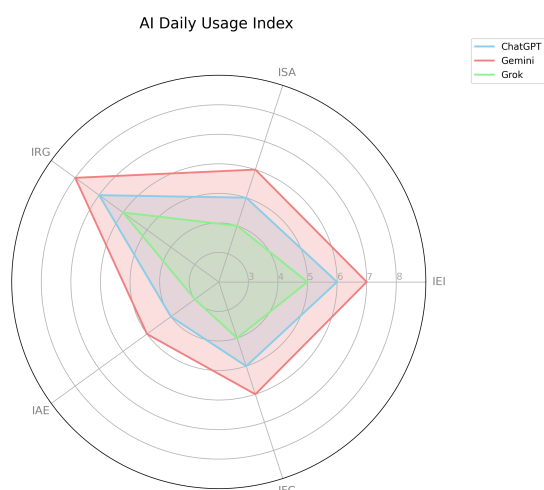


Figure 7. Platforms comparison used in this study.

It is important to note that the homogeneity of the sample, all from a similar geographical and cultural background in Mexico, may limit the applicability of these findings. The homogeneous nature of the sample—27 individuals sharing common educational and geographic backgrounds, recruited from the first author's personal network—limits the generalizability of these findings beyond this specific cohort. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples to validate the observed patterns across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

Future research should expand the sample to other generations (Boomers, Millennials, Gen Z) to observe intergenerational differences, include prolonged AI interaction sessions to analyze changes in attachment over time, evaluate the psychological impact of AI on emotionally vulnerable individuals, and explore how AI personality design (voice, perceived gender, and style) modifies the perception of flirtation or intimacy. This work does not seek to romanticize AI, but to understand what its emotional presence reveals about ourselves: what we lack, what we idealize, and what we seek even in non-human circuits. Applications like Brev AI for creating personalized songs and Pixaverse AI can easily complement the experience of a virtual entity that knows us perfectly, and as immersive technologies continue to advance, the boundary between real and virtual relationships

may become increasingly difficult to distinguish for generations navigating both worlds.

Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available on request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

This study complied with all applicable ethical standards for minimal-risk social science research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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